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## Psychology and History volume

### Chapter outline by Mark Knights, University of Warwick

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### Historical stereotypes and histories of stereotypes

History and social psychology share interests in the public sphere, the arts of persuasion and the formation of attitudes. As a result, both disciplines are interested in the construction, manipulation, dissemination and evolution of stereotypes and the prejudices on which they feed. The first section of this chapter outlines themes, conclusions and approaches drawn from psychology that might be particularly useful for historical analysis. Much of the social psychology literature about stereotyping should be of significant interest to historians, even though, it seems, it is seldom used by them. I shall then examine historical approaches to stereotyping and highlight some of the benefits of using historical data, which, in turn, is strikingly absent from most of the published social psychology work in the field. At one time the social sciences and history drew frequently on one another; now, that relationship, at least so far as psychology is concerned, seems more distant, though there are good reasons for thinking that some sort of rapprochement may be taking place and this chapter seeks to foster that process.<sup>1</sup> The final section of the chapter will take a case study, the stereotypes of reform and reformers in eighteenth and early nineteenth century Britain, in order to bring the two approaches together, and also to show how an even broader inter-disciplinary approach, integrating visual and linguistic concerns, might be a productive way forward.

## I

Social psychologists seem agreed that stereotyping is a by-product of normal cognitive processes that help us to order, simplify and hence better understand the complex world around us.<sup>2</sup> A stereotype is thus simply an association of attributes with a certain group of

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<sup>1</sup> 'Bridging History and Social Psychology', Special Issue of *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science* ed Vlad Glăveanu, Koji Yamamoto Volume 46, Issue 4, December 2012. See also note 4.

<sup>2</sup> A helpful overview can be found in Charles Stangor and Mark Schaller, 'Stereotypes as Individual and Collective Representations', in C. Neil Macrae, Charles Stangor, Miles Hewstone (eds.) *Stereotypes and Stereotyping* (Guilford Press, 1996). David Schneider, *The Psychology of Stereotyping*, chapter 8 (Guilford Press, New York, 2005) offers another good starting point.

people.<sup>3</sup> The human mind has to think with the help of categorisations which form part of an orderly mental outlook. All this has the advantage, for the historian, of considering stereotypes as a normal and ubiquitous mental processes rather than as something necessarily the product of a corrupted or distorted mind, and hence helps to make stereotypes 'rational' rather than 'irrational' phenomena, even when they are highly emotionally charged. Such an approach also makes it imperative to consider stereotypes historically: if they are part of the way in which the human mind works, they are as much a part of the past as the present. Yet this raises a further question, worth investigating in itself, about whether cognitive process in the modern era are the same as those of the pre-modern era or whether cognition is culturally constructed or at least influenced by the contemporary world. My assumption in what follows is that modern and pre-modern minds share enough similarities for recent research to have a bearing on how we understand the pre-modern mind. Although the culture of the past certainly shaped and perhaps even determined what people thought and (as recent work on the history of emotions suggests) felt, as well as how they behaved, I make the assumption that certain behavioural responses and cognitive functions relating to how information is processed by the brain remain the same or similar, sufficiently so for modern findings to have some relevance for the past or at least to raise interesting questions for the historian; but I freely admit that this is an untested and possibly controversial position that would benefit further exploration.<sup>4</sup>

Broadly speaking there are two different, but not necessarily incompatible, approaches to understanding stereotype formation: one examines the individual cognitive processes occurring in the individual, the other stresses the cultural and contextual factors that make for collective or shared, social representations. The former stresses the way in which the mind works whereas the latter highlights the influential role played by parents, teachers, political and religious leaders and, above all, the media and advertisements. This second approach, with its stress on cultural factors, might seem the more likely fit with cultural history; but the

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<sup>3</sup> A stereotype can, but need not necessarily, become a prejudice (an emotive pre-judgement) and lead to active discrimination. The relationship between stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination is explored in David Schneider, *The Psychology of Stereotyping*, chapter 8 (Guilford Press, New York, 2005); Charles Stangor (ed.), *Stereotypes and Prejudice: Essential Readings* (Psychology Press, 2000). The relationship between prejudice and categorical thinking was first systematically explored by Gordon Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (1954)

<sup>4</sup> William M Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: 2001); Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions: the Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (Cambridge 2003); Barbara Rosenwein, 'Worrying about Emotions in History', *American Historical Review*, 107 (2002), 921-45; Rosenwein, 'Problems and Methods in the History of Emotions', in *Passions in Context: International Journal for the History and Theory of Emotions*, 1 (2010), pp.1-11; *A History of Emotions, 1200–1800* ed Jonas Liliequist (2012). For a sceptical discussion about 'transhistorical laws in social psychology' urging the need to recognise change over time see K. Gergen, 'Social Psychology as History', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 26 (2) 1973, 309-320. Nevertheless Gergen concludes (318) that although expressions of behaviour are primarily culturally determined, some behaviour may be fixed and that 'we have yet to tap the vast quantities of information regarding interaction patterns in earlier periods'.

cognitive reaction of individuals is also surely important and can have implications for the historian, particularly, I suggest in what follows, in helping to understand the process by which stereotypes are constructed and maintained.

Indeed, despite the different schools there seems to be some common ground among social psychologists attempting to explain why stereotypes form. One common suggestion is that they strengthen the identity and esteem of 'in-groups', that is to say, groups with which an individual identifies.<sup>5</sup> In-groups have an internal cohesion that is in part derived from the identification of an 'out-group' with which they are in competition or conflict or tension. Indeed, another interesting characteristic noted by psychologists is that the more a group is seen as a unity or entity, the greater readiness there is to stereotype it, even in small, face-to-face groups where groups have a good deal of individualised information about each other (everyday interaction which other parts of the literature suggests might be expected to counteract the stereotype).<sup>6</sup> When we see a group of people as an entity, we will often attribute something essential to it. That process is also recognisable from historical stereotypes. Moreover, the social psychology literature suggests that stereotypes are, to a surprising extent, self-fulfilling: the expectation that an individual will act in a stereotypical fashion influences how that individual actually behaves. The formation of a stereotype is thus in some ways cyclical and self-reinforcing.<sup>7</sup> Again, such a process is historically observable. Confessions by witches, for example, show the degree to which the hostile stereotype was internalised and shaped behaviour.<sup>8</sup>

Stereotypes are particularly common in times of crisis and stress, when the mind needs to impose order on a complex and challenging 'information-rich environment'. 'Research amply demonstrates that the use of social stereotypes increases in cognitively demanding situations ...Needs to simplify and structure understanding may be heightened within societies during times of crisis, such as wars, economic recessions and natural disasters'.<sup>9</sup> These conclusions are particularly suggestive to the historian, since it was very often such periods of crisis in which the authority and identity of groups was contested, challenged and often vulnerable, requiring more frequent assertion and greater reinforcement, producing literatures rich in stereotypical observations.

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<sup>5</sup> For an overview see Schneider, *The Psychology of Stereotyping*, chapter 7.

<sup>6</sup> Rupert Brown, *Prejudice: its social Psychology* (2010), pp. 77-8.

<sup>7</sup> For an overview of this literature see Schneider, *The Psychology of Stereotyping*, pp.215-24.

<sup>8</sup> For witchcraft see Malcolm Gaskill, 'Witchcraft in early modern Ken: stereotypes and the background to accusations', in Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester and Gareth Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe: Studies in Culture and Belief* (Cambridge, 1998); Jim Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in Early Modern England* (1997); Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn. 2002); Clark (ed), *Languages of Witchcraft: Narrative, ideology and meaning in Early Modern Culture* (2001).

<sup>9</sup> Stangor and Schaller, 'Stereotypes as Individual and Collective Representations', pp. 21-2.

Although the terms are rather old-fashioned in the social psychology literature, the notions of schema and prototypes might also be useful to historians.<sup>10</sup> Schemas 'are abstract knowledge structures that specify the defining features and relevant attributes of a given concept' and since the historian often investigates concepts in the past, a means of thinking about concepts is particularly useful. Akin to the schema is the prototype, an 'averaged idea of the concept', a typical representation of it - again, something very familiar to the historian, as will be shown in the third part of this chapter.

The psychology literature also offers interesting suggestions about how stereotypes are maintained. One approach that straddles both the individual and cultural schools of social psychology is rooted in language. It has been noted that some pairings of words are much stronger than others and hence better remembered. Such strong or 'hot' associations help to form stereotypical associations.<sup>11</sup> Examining which words are associated with others thus helps us to understand how stereotypes are constructed and the emotive power they wield. The 'hot' associations may also help to explain why stereotypes are so enduring, often persisting across several generations. It has also been suggested, by Abric and others, that a collective or social representation has a 'central core', that is fundamental to its character, with peripheral elements that are less important and which might change over time and context.<sup>12</sup> The ideas expressed in the stable core also tend to be 'hot' words, closely related to emotional and bodily experience.

Another interesting approach, led by Semin, Fiedler and Maass, has been to examine the language used to describe in-groups and out-groups.<sup>13</sup> It was found that undesirable characteristics in the out-group tend to be described in abstract terms that describe states of being. Thus A hitting B might be summarised not as an observable one-off event but abstracted as a personality trait: 'A is violent'. But desirable characteristics displayed by the out-group tended to be described in much more specific ways that could be explained away as single incidents or aberrations from normal expectations. Conversely, undesirable

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<sup>10</sup> For an overview see *ibid*, pp.7-9; Schneider, *The Psychology of Stereotyping*, chapter 4.

<sup>11</sup> D. L. Hamilton, P. M. Dugan, and T.K. Trolier, 'The formation of stereotypic beliefs: Further evidence for distinctive-based illusory correlations', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 58 (1985), 5-17; B. Mullen and C. Johnson, 'Distinctiveness-based illusory correlations and stereotyping: a meta-analytical integration', *British Journal of Social Psychology* 29 (1990), 11-28; Wolfgang Wagner, Jose Valencia and Fran Elejabarrieta, 'Relevance, discourse and the 'hot' stable core of social representations-A structural analysis of word associations', *British Journal of Social Psychology* 35.3 (1996), 331-352

<sup>12</sup> J. C. Flament, and P Moliner, 'Contribution expérimentale à la théorie du noyau central d'une représentation' in J-L Beauvois, R-V Joule and J-M Monteil (eds.), *Perspectives cognitive et conduites sociales* (1989) J.C Abric, 'Central System, peripheral system: their functions and roles in the dynamics of social representations', *Papers on Social Representations* 2 (1993), 75-8; Abric, 'Les représentations sociales: aspects théoriques' in Abric (ed.), *Pratiques sociales et représentations* (Paris, 1994).

<sup>13</sup> For an overview see Schneider, *Psychology of Stereotyping*, pp. 553-9.

behaviour in one's own group tends to be described in very specific and hence limiting ways, with the more enduring abstractions being reserved for their desirable behaviour. Thus undesirable behaviour in one's own group tends to be excused as idiosyncratic, while that in an out-group tends to be generalised as characteristic of the group as a whole. Indeed, Semin and Fiedler, building on work by Roger Brown, drew up four categories of verbs (the 'linguistic category model') to describe the different ways in which language was being used, ranging from the abstract to the particular. The first two categories, 'descriptive action verb' and 'interpretative action verb', refer to specific events; the last two are more abstract: 'state verb' describes an emotional, affective or mental state, such as 'love', 'admire', 'desire', 'envy' and the fourth category, 'adjectives', describes highly abstract character dispositions, such as 'honest', 'impulsive', 'reliable'. Given that information at an abstract level is open-ended and resistant to change, the prevalence of abstractions in stereotypes might help to explain their longevity as well as why behaviour that does not conform to a stereotype can be discounted as isolated and untypical.<sup>14</sup>

Moving away from explanations rooted in cognitive psychology a group of social psychologists - Jonathan Potter, Margaret Wetherell and Michael Billig prominent among them- also study discourse in order to emphasise how the phenomenon of categorisation and stereotyping is a social practice involving certain sorts of language use.<sup>15</sup> As Potter and Wetherell put it, 'discourse analysis focuses, above all, on quintessentially psychological activities - activities of justification, rationalisation, categorisation, attribution, making sense, naming, blaming and identifying. Discourse studies links those activities with collective forms of social action' and uncovers 'a discursive history', a process that mixes 'representation and reality'.<sup>16</sup> This comes close to the 'linguistic turn' taken by historians which has resulted in a heightened awareness of the power of language itself to shape

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<sup>14</sup> R. Brown and D. Fish, 'The psychological causality implicit in language', *Cognition*, 14 (1983), 237-273; G. R. Semin and K. Fiedler, 'The linguistic category model, its bases, applications and range' in W. Stroebe and M. Hewstone (eds), *European Review of Social Psychology* vol. 2 pp.1-50; Semin and Fiedler, 'The inferential properties of interpersonal verbs' in Semin and Fiedler (eds), *Language, Interaction and social cognition* (1992); A. Maass, D. Salvi, L. Arcuri, and G. Semin, 'Language use in intergroup contexts: the linguistic intergroup bias', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 57 (1989), 981-993; Maass and Arcuri, 'The role of language in the persistence of stereotypes; in G.R. Semin and K. Fiedler (eds.), *Language, interaction and social cognition* (1992) ; Maass, A. Milesi, S. Zabbini, and D. Stahlberg, 'Linguistic inter-group bias: differential expectancies or in-group protection', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 68 (1995), 116-26.

<sup>15</sup> Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell, *Discourse and Social Psychology. Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour* (London, 1987); Margaret Wetherell and Jonathan Potter, *Mapping the Language of Racism. Discourse and the Legitimation of Exploitation* (Hemel Hempstead, 1992)

<sup>16</sup> Wetherell and Potter, *Mapping the Language*, pp.2, 4, 40.

behaviour, to create modern identities and mindsets, and to subvert the distinction ‘between representation and reality’.<sup>17</sup>

Further possibilities for a fruitful exchange between psychologists and historians around the issue of language are highlighted by Billig’s research which straddles both the pre-modern past and social psychology. His work on the importance of rhetoric as a way of thinking and arguing shows on the one hand the benefit to social psychologists of understanding how people in the pre-modern era were taught to think and speak. He shows how rhetoric’s stress on duality, dialogue and dialectic help to explain how thought is governed and shaped by cultural factors. There are, he shows, always opposing ways of categorising any situation, often involving the creation of sub-categories by splitting categories into parts (‘particularisation’) and prejudices are thus necessarily fluid, variable and adaptable.<sup>18</sup> This work has implications for historians. Billig’s assertion that ‘all the major themes of modern social psychology can be found in classical rhetoric’ should alert historians to finding ways of drawing on that literature about persuasion, categorisation, and ways of thinking.<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, this interest in language is where the historian (and literary historian) perhaps comes nearest to the psychologist. Rhetoric was learned by all educated people after the Renaissance.<sup>20</sup> Teaching the techniques of speaking well and persuasively, rhetoric had much in common with stereotyping. It stressed the need to arouse emotion, even to the extent of moving, exciting and agitating the audience and some rhetorical manuals encouraged orators to whip up hatred by denigrating their opponents. The author of the *Rhetorica Ad Herennium* thus argued that it was justifiable to turn adversaries into objects of hatred ‘if we can pin on them such attributes as violence, lust for power, factiousness, excessive wealth, and promiscuousness’.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, rhetoric encouraged exaggeration and re-description, which could convert virtues into vices or insinuate that vice was being disguised under a veil of virtue. The rhetorician thus ‘uncovered’ the vice of an antagonist – rather in the way that a stereotype claims to reveal the truth or reality about a group or an individual representing a group. And in trying to arouse emotion, rhetoricians also sought to conjure up what Walter Lippmann, when coining the term stereotype in 1922, called ‘speaking pictures’, in the minds of their audience. These vivid mental pictures could use metaphor to make them even more

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<sup>17</sup> Patrick Joyce, *Democratic Subjects: The Self and the Social in Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 1994), p.2. For an overview see E. A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge, Mass., 2004); Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in Working Class History 1832-1982* (Cambridge, 1984)

<sup>18</sup> M. Billig, ‘Prejudice, categorization and particularization: from a perceptual to a rhetorical approach’, *European Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 15, 79-103 (1985), pp. 98-9.

<sup>19</sup> M. Billig, *Arguing and Thinking: a rhetorical approach to social psychology* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn. 1996), p. 84.

<sup>20</sup> For an overview see J. Richards, *Rhetoric* (2007).

<sup>21</sup> Quoted by Q. Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge, 1997), p.131

striking, but it was also permissible to use ridicule and distortion. Rhetoric also encouraged thinking - or at least speaking - in terms of the binaries so familiar to students of stereotypes. Thomas Wilson's *Arte of Rhetorique* argued that 'by contraries set together, thynges oftentimes appere greater'.<sup>22</sup>

For the historian, then, the psychological literature contains a number of fruitful conclusions. There is advantage in studying stereotypes as: products of everyday mental processes; interactions between individual cognition and cultural constructions; influenced by media representations; ways in which every individual and every society makes sense of the complexities around them; phenomena more likely to occur at times of tension, crisis, and conflict; means of bolstering an in-group over another; being remarkable persistent over time and yet, at the periphery, responding to change; based on entitative abstractions of group rather than individual behaviour and on shared schema and prototypes; drawing a good deal of emotive power from the associations of particular words or labels, and using language in very particular ways that reinforce stereotypical concepts. Many of these approaches have inherently historical implications or might be tested using historical data. Language, at least in its written form, can at least be recovered from the past and analysed. Historians can thus study the part played by language in the construction and maintenance of stereotypes. Nevertheless, the lack of a historical perspective in much of the social psychology literature is striking and Billig was self-consciously aware that his approach differed radically from that adopted by many of his colleagues, to the extent that he found himself 'cut off from the wider academic world' of social psychology.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps because of its methodological reliance on experimenting with live subjects, almost the entire literature focuses on the present and ignores the data available from the past. Despite the recognition that stereotyping is a normal cognitive function, and hence must be common to mankind across time, there is an implicit assumption, seldom examined or even fully stated, that modern mass society has in some way been transformative, ruling out historical data as of relevance to modern conceptions. Of course, it is true that modern visual and virtual media is in some ways different to earlier print and manuscript means of communication, but the differences can easily be exaggerated and a good deal might be learned from studies of earlier stereotypical representations.

The lack of a pre-modern historical perspective pervades not only the social psychology literature but also work done by sociologists and students of the media. For example, from a media studies perspective, Michael Pickering's rather illuminating work draws on twentieth century history but goes no further back in time.<sup>24</sup> The focus on the present and the very recent past may have something to do with the foundation of stereotyping as a concept: Lippmann was a political journalist trying to analyse the effects of modern mass media. Yet the lack of a historical perspective curtails some aspects of social psychology's investigations. For example, one important element of stereotype studies has to do with how far and fast they can change over time (and hence also how negative prejudices can be overcome or diminished). David Schneider, for example, says that culture is important in the development of stereotypes 'but its role is often indirect and hard to document', a problem to

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<sup>22</sup> Wilson, *The Arte of Rhetorique* (1553), p.69; cf. Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric*, p.413

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, pp. 6-7.

<sup>24</sup> M. Pickering, *Stereotyping: the Politics of Representation* (2001)



which the historian is nevertheless accustomed and equipped with certain tools to deal with.<sup>25</sup> Similarly if stereotypes are not fixed but can either evolve or even be modified, as is now generally recognised in the literature, then they are inherently historical things that demand to be tracked over time.<sup>26</sup>

## II

If much of the social psychology literature is curiously a-historical, the historical literature on stereotypes also makes little use of social psychology. The term 'stereotype' is quite often used by historians, yet is a concept that is seldom theorised; or, more generously, it has been theorised through engagement with other cognate disciplines such as literature, linguistics, sociology, political science and anthropology rather than psychology. What follows is an attempt to sketch some of the ways in which historians have thought about the process of stereotyping and the fields of study in which historical work on stereotypes has been conducted. My focus for the latter will be on my own area of expertise, pre-modern history, but I hope to raise methodological issues that extend beyond this period and hence have a wider application.

There is now a considerable body of historical work that explores stereotypes in what is known as the 'early modern' period, from about 1500 to about 1800.<sup>27</sup> Historians have charted their pervasive use in religious controversies that raged as a result of the Protestant reformation and the Catholics' own reformation and counter-reformation. Some of the most interesting material in the British context relates to polemical constructs of the 'hotter sort of protestants' known as Puritans<sup>28</sup> and the construction of prejudices against Catholics - work to which we shall return shortly.<sup>29</sup> At the same time, stereotypes of unorthodox belief, such as

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<sup>25</sup> Schneider, *The Psychology of Stereotyping*, p.23,

<sup>26</sup> For a discussion of how stereotypes change see *ibid* chapter 10.

<sup>27</sup> An extensive bibliography for the points made in this paragraph can be found in Mark Knights, 'Taking a Historical Turn: Possible Points of Connection Between Social Psychology and History', *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science* (2012).

<sup>28</sup> P. Collinson, 'The Puritan Character: Polemics and Polarities in Early Seventeenth Century English Culture' (1989), reprinted in Collinson, *From Cranmer to Sancroft* (London 2006); Collinson, 'Ecclesiastical Vitriol: Religious Satire in the 1590s and the Invention of Puritanism' in John Guy (ed) *The Reign of Elizabeth I* (Cambridge, 1994); Haigh, 'The character of an Anti-puritan', *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 35.3 (2004); P. Lake, 'Puritan Identity' in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 35 (1984), 112-23; Lake, 'Anti-Puritanism: The Structure of a Prejudice' in K. Fincham and P. Lake (eds.), *Religious Politics in Post-Reformation England: Essays in Honour of Nicholas Tyacke* (Woodbridge, 2006)

<sup>29</sup> P. Lake, 'Anti-Popery: the Structure of a Prejudice', in R. Cust and A. Hughes (eds), *Conflict in Early Stuart England* (London 1989); A. Milton, 'A Qualified Intolerance: the Limits and Ambiguities of Early Stuart Anti-Catholicism', in A. Marotti (ed.), *Catholicism and Anti-Catholicism in Early Modern English Texts* (Basingstoke 1999); A. Walsham, *Church Papists: Catholicism, Conformity and Confessional Polemic in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge, 1993).

atheism and Judaism, have been studied, though most attention has focused on witchcraft which has provided a very rich supply of stereotypical material. Perhaps closer to the social psychology literature has been the work on race and gender. Stereotypes of women, homosexuals and blacks have been explored quite extensively, together with analysis of the poor and outcast. Work on the role of the printing press - the new technology of the pre-modern period that was later to give the stereotype its name, after a process developed in the eighteenth century to fix type - also relates to the social sciences literature in exploring how the media helped to shape collective representations. Historical work on national identity, including the emergence and fostering of a sense of Britishness, and on partisan politics also offers insights into the construction of in and out groups. Finally, some of the literary and visual techniques associated with stereotyping have been explored through studies of rhetoric and satire, both verbal and visual.

This work has both generated and borrowed from some interesting approaches, some of which have run in parallel with those of social psychology but amplify it in important ways. One influential concept has been the 'imagined community' described by that pioneered by an historically-minded political scientist, Benedict Anderson.<sup>30</sup> Applying his idea to nationalism, Anderson suggests that the nation was itself an imagined construct made possible by historical conditions such as the growth of the press and the erosion of the ideology of divine right monarchy. An 'imagined community' was thus a cultural construct, historically determined in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, creating a prototype replicated elsewhere.

Identity also proved a fertile concept for the literary critic Edward Said who, in his exploration of the prejudices against oriental culture, stressed the process of 'Othering' by which false images of Asian and Middle Eastern culture had been created against which Western identity was shaped. Western writings about the Orient depict it as an irrational, weak, feminised "Other", contrasted with the rational, strong, masculine West. Thus the stereotypes of the oriental helped to define both East *and* West, permeated all western attitudes and literature, and also in turn justified western imperialism.<sup>31</sup> Both the 'imagined community' and the process of 'Othering' have been widely taken up in historical works, particularly (but by no means exclusively) by those concerned with issues of national identity.

The binaries at work in Said's approach were also the subject of historian Stuart Clarke's approach to the study of witchcraft.<sup>32</sup> Clarke analysed an early modern mindset that he argued was culturally predetermined to think in terms of opposites or 'contraries' and

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<sup>30</sup> B. Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (1983)

<sup>31</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978)

<sup>32</sup> S. Clark, 'Inversion, Misrule and the Meaning of Witchcraft', *Past and Present*, 87 (1980), 98-127; Clark, *Thinking with Demons: the idea of witchcraft in early modern Europe* (1997)

hence which readily and rationally accepted notions of divergent orthodox and unorthodox religious beliefs that were expressed in a persecuting prejudice against witches. The language of inversion, antithesis, and contrariety and the habit of binary thinking which permeated contemporary attitudes supplied, he argues, the essential discursive framework within which the concept of witchcraft made sense. Moreover, he shows how this framework pervaded a variety of subjects - language, science, history, religion and politics - that collectively shaped attitudes to witches. This stress on the need to examine a holistic 'system of thought' offers a rigorous and satisfying explanation for the construction of a prejudice, though whether the binary mentality that he identified ended with the Enlightenment and hence coincided with the end of witchhunts seems unconvincing. Indeed, a binary mentality clearly endured well beyond the end of the witch craze, as will become apparent in part three.

Binary oppositions in religious polemic have proved a particularly rich source for historians, because of the crisis created by the protestant and catholic reformations in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Protestant demonization of the catholic other, and catholic or moderate protestant hatred of protestant zealotry produced in Britain the powerful and enduring prejudices of 'anti-popery' and 'anti-puritanism'. Peter Lake, in an influential article examining the 'construction of a prejudice', suggested that 'anti-popery' (that is to say, hostility not just to the catholic church but also to the political and cultural authority it wielded) was a complex entity, made up of different strands of argument and narrative. The various elements could be combined by different individuals and groups into different versions of 'popery', thereby constructing different versions of the groups defining themselves against it. Thus 'anti-popery' and 'anti-puritanism', Lake argued, were enduring but not fixed stereotypes: aspects that were central to one polemical moment or group identity might, in different circumstances, or in the hands of other polemicists, become peripheral. 'We are not dealing with coherent ideological positions, but rather with constellations of ideas, attributes and narratives, which could be arranged into a number of differently inflected syntheses, to meet a variety of polemical circumstances and forward a range of often very different, indeed sometimes mutually exclusive political purposes'.<sup>33</sup> Such a view makes a stereotype a highly fluid, contingent entity, constituted by many different parts each of which might be stressed at any one time, depending on the context, with the result that the stereotype could and did change over time.<sup>34</sup> In short, Lake argues, the stereotype has a history, an argument entirely compatible with, and reinforcing of, the conclusions of social psychologists Billig, Potter and Wetherell.

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<sup>33</sup> Lake, 'Anti-puritanism', pp. 82, 96; Lake, 'Anti-popery', pp. 72-83, 98-103

<sup>34</sup> Lake does not, however, see the stereotype as full of agency, creating what it sought to attack, although another eminent historian of the reformation, Patrick Collinson, clearly did: for Collinson anti-puritanism helped to create Puritanism. For Collinson, understanding the stereotype is essential to understanding the past, since stereotypes were not simply a reflection of antipathies but helped to constitute them.

The role of polemic in the construction of anti-popery and anti-puritanism highlights the importance of the new technology of the printing press in the construction, articulation and absorption of stereotypes but there is relatively little agreement amongst historians about how far the press fabricated stereotypes. For many historians of the pre-modern period oral and manuscript cultures were as important in shaping popular attitudes, and oral, print and scribal cultures worked symbiotically rather than in tension with one another.<sup>35</sup> Stereotypes were thus created through conversation as well as through the media that represented or replicated it. For other historians, however, the print revolution, with its capacity to reproduce the same text more extensively, penetrated all social levels and provided a shared set of cultural attitudes.<sup>36</sup>

Historians, when invoking the term ‘stereotype’, have thus made use of a variety of notions and approaches: an imagined community, ‘Othering’, binary mentalities, the manipulability and mutability of stereotypes for polemical purposes, the nature of print, the role of conversation and the power of words. These approaches in some way overlap with or touch on those adopted by psychologists. ‘Othering’ and ‘out groups’, or ‘imagined communities’ and ‘social representations’ are not too dissimilar and there is a common interest in binaries and the role of the media. Similarly, the capacity of words to shape cognition is recognised in both the social psychology literature and the historical-literary works that investigate rhetorical practices. To be sure, there are interesting differences. Abric’s stable core and changeable periphery, for example, has something in common with Lake’s notion of constellations of attributes that could be arranged and rearranged to stress different elements, but Lake’s model has a far less stable, and more manipulable, core than Abric allows for. Yet it is clear that historians and social psychologists are often pursuing similar problems from slightly different perspectives and that historical work (both in terms of approach and data) might greatly enrich the perspective of the currently very present-centred psychologist.

### III

This final section will attempt to bring together some of the historical and psychological approaches in order to examine stereotypes that are part of a polemical battle. Building on the linguistic approach taken by both sets of secondary literature, I will show how rival groups sought to ‘capture’ key terms and attributes in order to win popular support. The analysis aims to offer a dynamic, contested and even dialectical explanation for how stereotypes evolve. In this version, alternative and competing visions of particular groups struggled for the control of the stereotype, in order to achieve positive rather than negative associations.

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35 A. Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England 1500-1700* (Oxford, 2000); A. Fox and D. Woolf (eds.), *The spoken word : oral culture in Britain, 1500-1850* (Manchester 2002); H. Love, *Scribal Publication in seventeenth century England* (1993)

36 E. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (Cambridge, 2 vols. 1979). For tensions over the role of the press see also D. Lemmings and C. Walker (eds.), *Moral Panics and the Law in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke, 2009), a volume that examines the ‘media panic’ model advocated by Stanley Cohen.

They did this by trying to wrest from opponents the usage of a positively charged word or attribute to attach to their cause; or by trying to attach a negatively charged word to their opponents' identity. The two sides engaged *in a contest* with each other, so that there were different constructions of the same phenomenon, even at the same time. These different constructions were necessarily closely related to one another: the positive and negative stereotypes were two different representations of the same phenomenon that were fought over in a struggle that itself shaped how the two sides interacted. The stereotyping process was thus dialogic, as the two groups responded to each other's interventions.

The section also seeks to make methodological points about the importance of images in the process of stereotyping. Lippmann's 'pictures in the mind' can be taken more literally than he perhaps intended, for images can embody stereotypical attributes, not least because they could also contain or echo the linguistic construction of the stereotype. The pre-modern mind, like the modern one, was also conditioned to thinking visually. Even if Protestantism was distrustful of religious imagery, the Renaissance 'emblem' was an ubiquitous genre, combining an instructive image of a concept or keyword with a set of verse that explained the image's iconography. The 'emblem' was still in use at the beginning of the eighteenth century and continued to influence the representation of concepts. Increasingly, however, a new form, the graphic satire, was becoming a useful vehicle for the visual manipulation of stereotypes. Initially these graphic satires emulated the emblem, with titles, images and texts; but increasingly the explanatory text became minimised or embedded within the image itself. By the late eighteenth century, such images were a common part of polemical battles and provide a rich source for the study of stereotypes.<sup>37</sup> Fortunately, the superb British Museum website, which contains most of the extensive collection of prints and drawings, is searchable by keyword, so that such analyses are possible.<sup>38</sup> Even if visual material is not as well catalogued as the printed word, we still have enough to show the merits of using such material. In other words, a study of stereotypes offers a way not only of bringing history and social psychology together but also of uniting them with other disciplines, such as art history but also sociology, media studies and literary criticism.<sup>39</sup> Such a multi-disciplinary approach, it is hoped, will not only be of appeal to a wide audience but also show the large degree of common ground between the disciplines, as well as the gaps and differences between them.

I shall illustrate these points through an analysis of images of 'reform' and reformers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. 'Reform' became an important term in the second half of the eighteenth century, though it continued to resonate with the legacy of 'reformation' that had been used to describe the religious changes of the sixteenth and

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<sup>37</sup> Vic Gatrell, *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth-Century* (2006);

<sup>38</sup> [http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search\\_the\\_collection\\_database.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database.aspx).

<sup>39</sup> The role of visual culture in a history of concepts is explored in Iain Hampsher-Monk, Karin Tilmans, and Frank van Vree (eds.), *History of Concepts: Comparative Perspectives* (Amsterdam, 1998).

seventeenth centuries.<sup>40</sup> The term 'reform' increasingly became associated with parliamentary reform, though it could also embrace other forms too (such as 'economical reform' which meant the state's, especially the Crown's, financial and patronage structures and influence). Reform was a wide-reaching but also a disturbing and divisive process because it raised so many questions about what line of reform to take and how best to pursue it. Reform was thus a polarising process that encouraged binary representations to depict advocates as either good or bad. Reform and reformers were endowed by sympathisers and critics with very different characteristics: the stereotype of the reformer was contested. My concern here is less with the history of reform and more with how it can shed light on stereotyping processes.

Anti-reform graphic satire was common in the 1790s, when opponents of reform sought to associate it with what they saw as the horrors of the French revolution. In other words, this was one of those 'moments of crisis' that so often produced and hardened stereotypes. Such images also often associate reform with the controversial politician and leader of the Whig party, Charles James Fox, who often voiced critiques of the existing system and whose distinctive face and perceived vices became associated with the reformer. An individual was therefore used to epitomise the group and to make the threat posed by the group seem real - here the stereotype was less of a group than of a particular individual who was made to symbolise the group, thereby enabling the group to be tainted with his alleged vices. The negative depiction of reform also involved embedding the word in a network of associated terms, each of which had its own set of associations and histories. Very often, as the following section makes clear, these terms were the abstractions noted by proponents of the Linguistic Category Model discussed earlier. Thus although reform was tied closely to the Fox and his vices, the stereotype was universalised through the suggestion that the abstract traits depicted in the images, by means of key words or labels, were shared ones among other reformers. We can also discern rhetorical ways of thinking and arguing being invoked, with the articulation of counter-arguments within these prints and a flexibility in how the stereotype came to be used.

These points can be illustrated by analysis of the images themselves.

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<sup>40</sup> For an excellent history of the term see J. Innes, "'Reform'" in *English Public Life: the fortunes of a word*, in A. Burns and J. Innes (eds.), *Rethinking the Age of Reform: Britain 1780-1850* (Cambridge 2003)





of the law, crown and church, led to a flourishing state.<sup>41</sup> The negatively charged, abstract terms occur frequently in other images, often in the same grouping, suggesting a shared set of associations. Thus many of the image's anti-reform 'hot words' relate to irreligion - 'atheism', 'blasphemy', 'impiety' and 'deism' (the belief in a non-Christian God) - and were contrasted with the flourishing 'religion' in the background. In late eighteenth century Britain religious feelings were particularly emotive: the old hostility against puritans and dissenters (those who challenged the established Church of England) had plenty of vigour, reanimated both by attempts to reform the church and by the French Revolution's attack on orthodox Christianity. A parallel image by a different artist, Thomas Rowlandson, strikingly echoes the network of terms used by Gillray and also widens it to include other associated terms:



Fig 2: Thomas Rowlandson, *The Contrast* (1792).

In figure 2, 'French liberty' is thus, as in the Gillray print, associated with 'atheism', and contrasted, in binary fashion (indeed, as though these are almost literally two sides of the same coin), with the 'religion' and 'morality' associated with 'English liberty'. Similarly the 'plunder' associated with reform in the Gillray images is echoed by the 'national and private ruin' in the Rowlandson image; and the pejorative 'revolution' in the Gillray is the theme of the Rowlandson print. It is interesting to note that all the positively charged terms used by Gillray - religion, law, justice, happiness - were also deployed by Rowlandson, suggesting a

<sup>41</sup> For the importance of binaries and inversions see G.Jahoda, 'Beyond Stereotypes', *Culture and Psychology* 7(2) (2001), 309-20.



tightly constructed network of positively charged, emotive abstractions. Here, then, was a 'core' of attributes. Liberty, it seems from these images, does not need reform.

The charged network of terms apparent in the Gillray satire is also reminiscent of a third image, by William Dent, showing Fox as a ‘democrat’ and also further widening the cluster of associated terms:

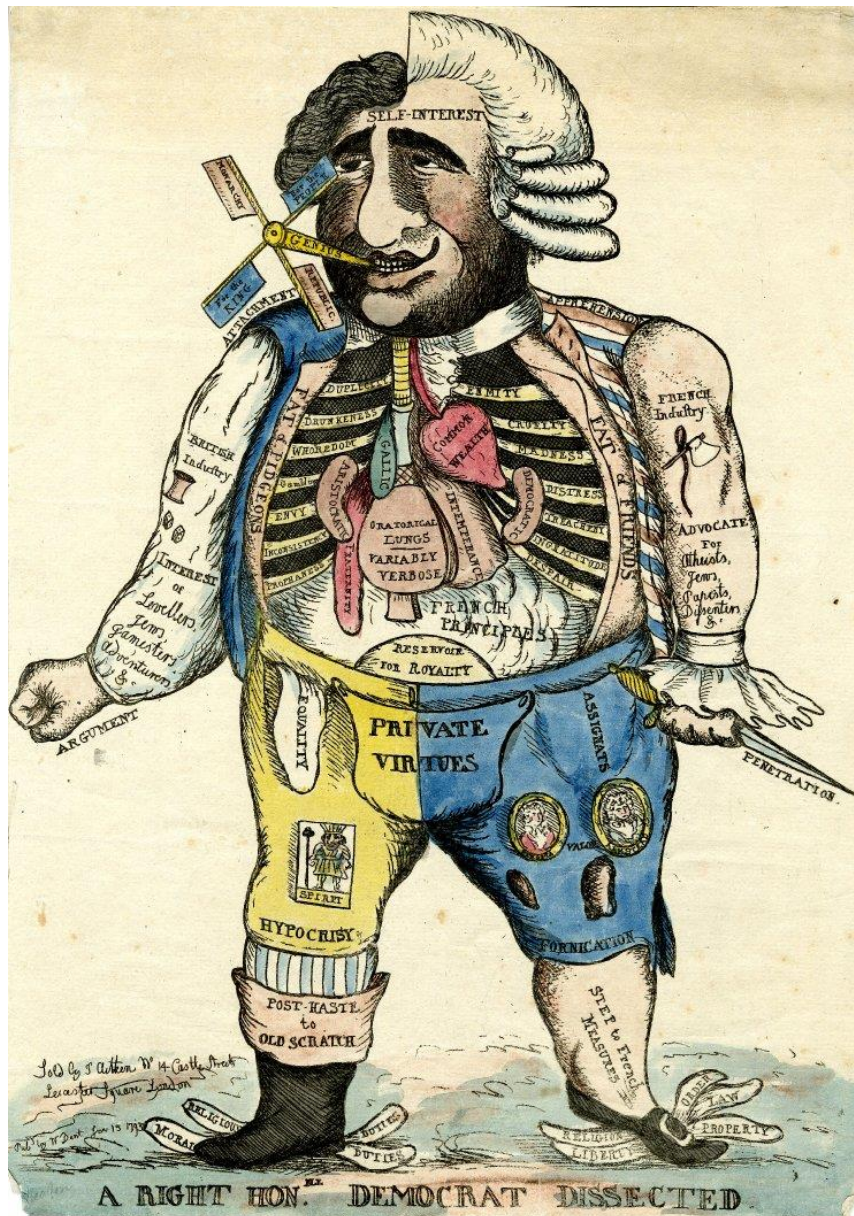


Fig. 3. William Dent, *A Right Hon. Democrat Dissected* (1793)

Figure 3 makes use of the terms ‘envy’ and ‘ingratitude’, which had formed the roots of Gillray’s diseased tree, as labels for Fox’s ribs (as do ‘madness’, ‘treachery’ and ‘cruelty’ which feature in the Rowlandson’s depiction of revolutionary liberty), and his right arm carries the maxim ‘Advocate for Atheists, Jews, Papists and Dissenters’, reinforcing the association with those who were thought to attack the Church of England. ‘Religion’, ‘liberty’, ‘property’, ‘law’ and ‘morality’ are again being crushed under Fox’s feet. The

image also suggests (as rhetoric taught and as many other stereotypes did), that Fox's external persona hid a conspiratorial inner one. Asch and Zukier argue that people distinguish between an inner and outer person, in order to resolve inconsistencies - thus a person might exhibit a trait on the outside but the perceivers might conclude it did not reflect the true, inner person, and hence there was no need to change their mental stereotype.<sup>42</sup> Hence 'hypocrisy' labelled clearly on Fox's knee.

One powerful means of creating a sense of a stereotypical in-group against reform was the use of Britannia (seen in figure 2) and John Bull (in figure 1). The representation of Britannia as a beautiful virgin seated on a rock with shield and spear first appeared on a coin in 1672, when Britain was threatened by Dutch power. The ravishing of Britannia in figure 4 by a skeleton of death wearing only a cloak of 'radical reform' (the pejorative adjective further charging the word), despite her shield of 'religion' and a fiery sword of 'the laws', was clearly another means of invoking the props of 'British liberty' depicted in figure 2. The French cap of liberty, given such prominence in figure 1 as a sign of the excessive and foreign notion of liberty associated with reform, is again apparent on the figure of death in figure 4. Similarly, figure 1 used the figure of John Bull, much to the same effect. John Bull was the stereotype invented at the beginning of the eighteenth century in order to symbolise British national identity and common sense.<sup>43</sup> John Bull's resistance of French liberty/reform is clear.



<sup>42</sup> S. E. Asch and H. Zukier, 'Thinking about persons', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 46, (1984) 1230-1240.

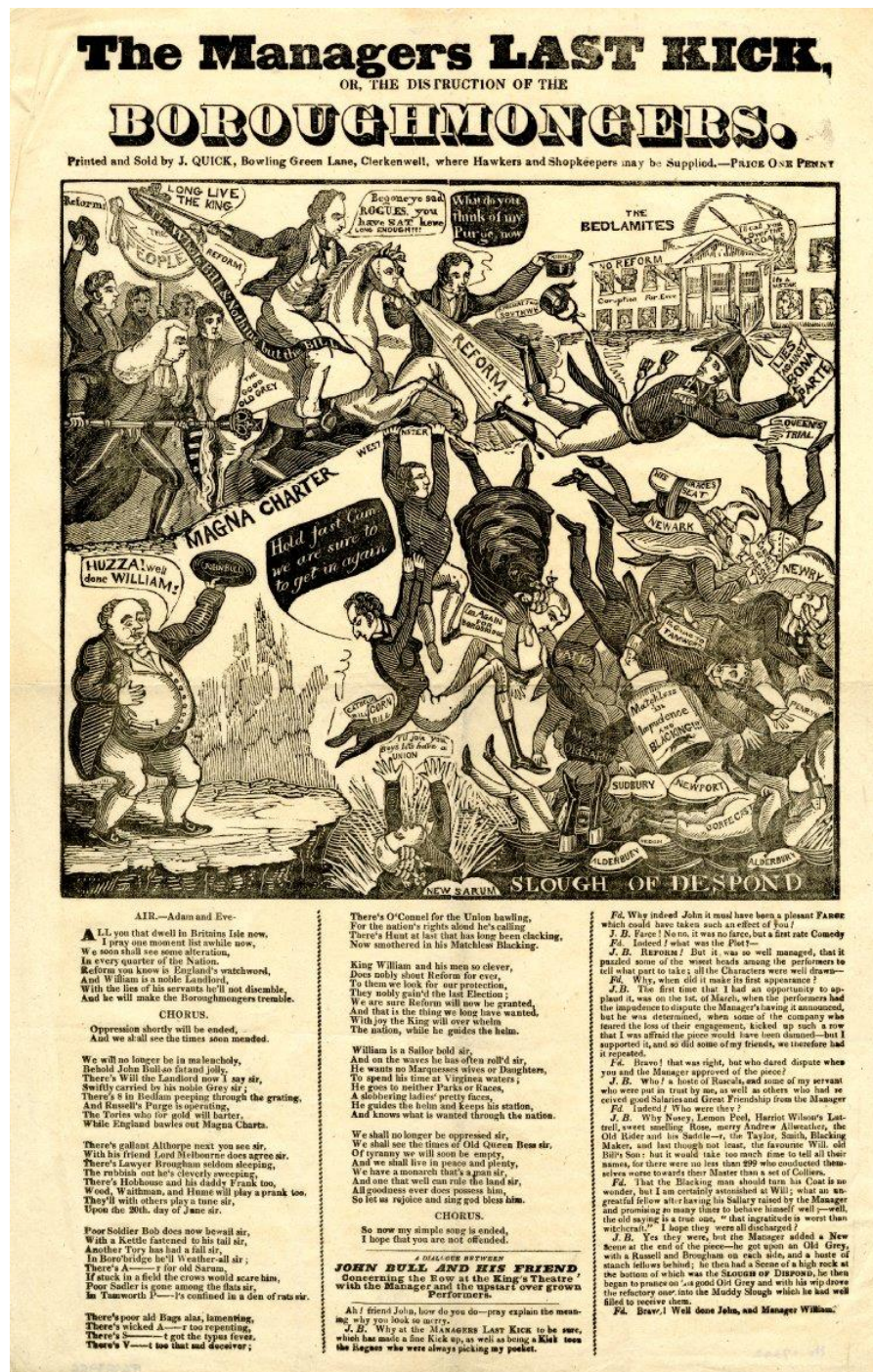
<sup>43</sup> For an excellent history of John Bull see Miles Taylor, 'John Bull and the iconography of public opinion in England c.1712-1929', *Past and Present* (1992)







the rotten tree.<sup>44</sup> Reform could thus be depicted as loyal and pro-monarchy, and hence as the means to secure law and peace.



<sup>44</sup> A remarkably similar image, Heath's *The Tree of Corruption* (1831), uses very much the same idea of the reform bill cutting down corruption. See also *The champions of reform destroying the monster of corruption* which shows the monster of corruption being attacked. Other images, use the idea of the reform bill as a broom sweeping away the rotten boroughs [such as *The Revolution of 1831; Sweeping Measures*]



Fig 6 Charles Jameson Grant, *The managers last kick* (c.1830-5) BM Satires 17342

Figure 6 shows King William IV riding 'the good old Grey' (an allusion to the reformist Earl Grey), with 'reform' exhalant from the horse's mouth, and the ground on which they stand is 'Magna Charter', the embodiment of the legal tradition. Whereas in the 1790s reform was stereotyped as a threat to law and the monarchy, by the 1830s those who *opposed* reform were now stereotyped in the same way. What had previously been depicted as French and anti-patriotic, could now be represented as British and patriotic. This is a point forcibly made by an image of Britannia with a banner of reform:

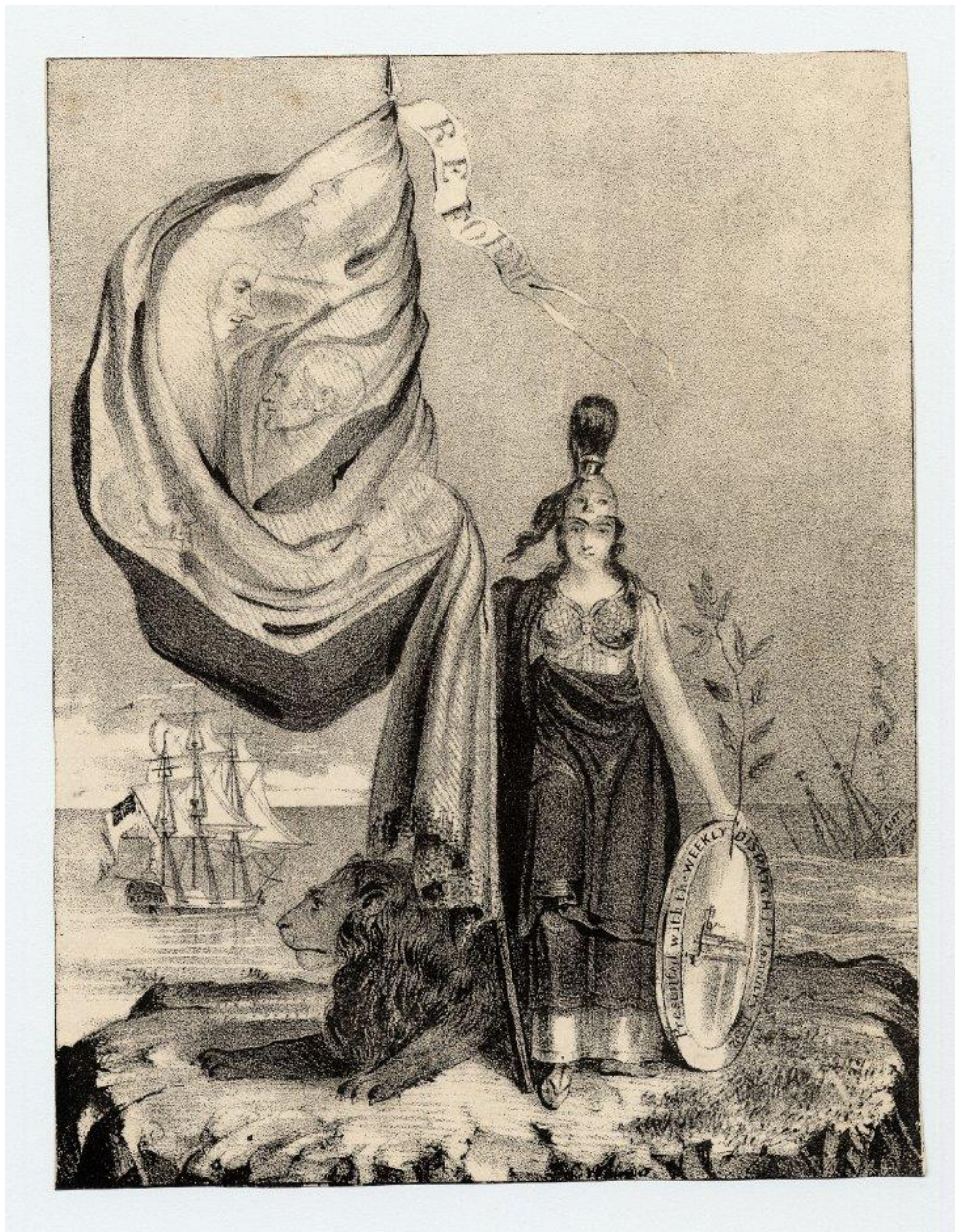


Fig 7 Anon print of 1831 [[BM Satires 16924](#)]

Indeed the symbolism of figure 7, with Britannia, the ship of state and the British lion, is almost the exact reverse of earlier anti-reform images such as figure 2, with reform now associated with the positive attributes depicted there.

## Conclusion

The first two sections of this chapter examined ways in which social psychology might be useful to history, and how history might in turn be useful to social psychology. The third section offered a case study that sought to bring these two perspectives together.

The evidence presented in the case study supports many of the findings made by social psychologists about the nature of in-groups and out-groups, about the persistence of binaries as a way of thinking, about the importance of the media in constructing and disseminating stereotypes, and about the importance of networks of abstract, highly charged and emotive terms. But it also modifies and challenges some conclusions. First, the role played in stereotypes by 'state' verbs - that describe states of being - might be extended to include charged abstract concepts or keywords such as 'liberty', 'happiness', 'prosperity' and 'religion'. Verbs were thus only part of a much wider linguistic framework that helped to construct, maintain and change stereotypes. Recovering how such keywords worked in relation to stereotypes is thus a fertile area for research, one which can (and perhaps can only) be explored in an interdisciplinary fashion. Secondly, the notion that stereotypes have a fixed, unchanging 'core' with a periphery that is more responsive to context may hold true for some stereotypes - and it may be that gender and race are less subject to change - but others are more fluid and malleable, manipulable by groups that sought to wrest control of key concepts, symbols and terms.<sup>45</sup>

Above all, the diverging representations of reform suggest that stereotypes could be, and were, contested in polemical battles in which both sides sought to appropriate key attributes and symbols for their own side. In other words, stereotypes were not so much fixed as part of a moving battle, in which very different constructions could be pitted against one another and in which groups could appropriate attributes from each other. The findings of the case study of 'reform' support Lake's suggestion, supported by Billig, that stereotypes were complex entities with histories that are worth charting, that they are both historical (being clearly pervasive well before the advent of modern mass society) and have histories that change over time. It would, of course, be interesting to know more about the particular terms and symbols that helped to constitute them, since these also clearly had histories of their own. Some of the attributes associated with the reform controversy had short histories - 'radical', in its modern sense of seeking to overturn the established order, for example, was an eighteenth century term- but others, such as 'corruption' or 'liberty', reached far back in time and even to different contexts. We might also chart histories of the vices and virtues that played such a prominent role in stereotype construction. In other words, there is a historical legacy of charged words, concepts and symbols that it would be useful to reconstruct.

It may of course be that polemical battles between two groups, both of which had access to print media, resulted in slightly unusual types of stereotype. More often, it might be said, stereotypes reflect a dominant majority demonising and exercising power over a minority.

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<sup>45</sup> This is related to but also seems to go beyond the 'attitudinal ambivalence' discussed in K. Jonas, P. Broemer and M. Diehl, 'Attitudinal Ambivalence', *European Review of Social Psychology*, 11:1 (2000), 35-74

There is something to be said for that view. On the other hand, the reformers who in the 1790s were very much in a minority managed over time to build a majority and reform was enacted in 1832. The changes in the stereotype of reformers might therefore have a wider resonance. Not only do they highlight the importance of a historical view of the evolution of a stereotype, they also indicate the degree to which stereotypes can be contested and challenged, even by out-groups, and that, when successful, this process involves the reconfiguration and appropriation of networks of attributes. Control of context-dependent key terms, traits and symbols is, history suggests, contestable.

This chapter has sought to highlight the importance of analysing stereotypes historically and the advantages that might exist were social psychologists to do so more systematically than they have done so far. Similarly, historians might do more to problematise how far cognitive processes changed over time, acknowledge stereotyping as a normal rather than aberrant or irrational process, and also be more sensitive to how different types of language shaped the mental pictures created by them (an issue that should also draw in expertise from linguists as well and offers an area of common concern across the disciplines). Given shared interests in the public sphere, the arts of persuasion and the formation of attitudes, historians might also explore the social psychology literature on these themes in order to distinguish between fixed or durable social phenomena and those subject to historical context, an enterprise that could harness the energies of both groups of scholars.